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U.S. denies CIA link to Nicaraguan supply flights

From Staff and Wire Reports

WASHINGTON — Official Washington sources yesterday quickly denied allegations made by a detained American in Nicaragua that the CIA was involved with supply flights to Nicaraguan rebels.

At the same time, inquiries were being launched by the FBI and the Senate into the matter and one was being called for in the House.

Following Eugene Hasenfus' press conference in Managua, the CIA reiterated its blanket denial of involvement. "We had nothing to do with that plane," said Kathy Pheron, the agency spokeswoman.

Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams said Mr. Hasenfus was not telling the truth because of Sandinista threats and intimidation. He said no one should believe anything Mr. Hasenfus says.

Also in Washington, John K. Singlaub, a retired U.S. Army major general who raises funds to aid Nicaraguan rebels, said that neither he nor his organization had any connection with the airplane shot down in Nicaragua Sunday, nor with Mr. Hasenfus.

General Singlaub is chairman of the U.S. Council for World Freedom, which, according to its charter, raises funds to provide exclusively

humanitarian aid to those resisting communism in Central America and elsewhere.

A report in *The New York Times* Tuesday, carried in part by *The Sun*, quoted unnamed Reagan administration officials as saying General Singlaub's organization operated the plane.

The former general said at a news conference that he had spent the day calling contacts within the administration to determine who might have said that, but found no answers.

He left no doubt, however, that he was in full sympathy with the plane's mission, which was apparently to deliver arms and ammunition. "These people, the Nicaraguan freedom fighters, are desperate for supplies," he said.

General Singlaub said in a week-end television interview that he regularly informed the CIA and the White House about his activities and "from time to time, I would get a 'Good job, Jack, appreciate what you're doing.'"

Mr. Abrams said Wednesday that the Americans carrying arms to the anti-Sandinista rebels "are heroes" who should be praised because "they were fighting for freedom in Central America."

And President Reagan told re-

porters Wednesday, "We've been aware that there are private groups and private citizens that have been trying to help the contras . . . but we did not know the exact particulars of what they're doing."

Asked whether he approved of such private efforts, Mr. Reagan said, "We're in a free country where private citizens have a great many freedoms."

The Neutrality Act forbids private individuals from carrying out military expeditions from U.S. soil against countries that are not at war with the United States.

FBI spokesman Paul Miller said in Miami that two agents began an inquiry Wednesday to find out whether the Neutrality Act or any other U.S. statutes had been violated by the efforts to supply the "contra" rebels.

Justice Department spokesman John Russell said the FBI initiated the preliminary inquiry on its own, not at the department's direction.

"But we have no quarrel with that decision. We don't know the facts of the case here," he said. "The mere fact that an aircraft was taking off down there . . . would not constitute a violation of the Neutrality Act."

"It's questionable whether parachuting weapons and boots into Nicaragua would violate the Neutrality

Act in itself. It has to come from the United States, and that's what the preliminary inquiry is about."

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee said Wednesday it was launching its own investigation. And Representative Henry B. Gonzalez, D-Texas, has called for an investigation to find out whether there is any CIA involvement on behalf of the contras.

Sen. David Durenberger, R-Minn., chairman of the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence, said yesterday, "All I know about is what Bill Casey and Bob Gates of the CIA tell me — they have denied . . . having anything to do with the private operations" to resupply the contras.

"What I have difficulty believing is why somebody in the government doesn't know who was running the private operation."

After committee leaders met yesterday with CIA Director William J. Casey, committee Vice Chairman Sen. Patrick J. Leahy, D-Vt., expressed nervousness about a possible CIA role in efforts to resupply the contras.

"The administration has got a real credibility problem on this one" and is "skating on a thin icebed," he said. "A lot of questions have been raised and I don't have the answers."